

Merging and Development of Tourism and Regional Revitalisation Initiatives in Japan

- A Consideration of the Phenomenon *Kanko Machizukuri* (Tourism and Urban Planning)

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This paper analyses the phenomenon known as *kanko machizukuri*, the combination of tourism and regional revitalisation initiatives. This new concept has become the focus of much attention in recent years. The study results show that the concept of *kanko machizukuri* was made possible due to the simultaneous development of tourism and civilian management of the shared space known as *machizukuri* within Japan's historic context that the development occurred much later but more rapidly than other advanced countries.

Keywords: Revitalisation, *Machizukuri*, Governance, Community Development, Participation, Partnership

1. The Two Aspects: Kanko and Machizukuri

Coined from the combination of the Japanese words for tourism *kanko* and city development *machizukuri*, the phrase *kanko machizukuri* appears frequently in the field of Japanese tourism studies. Although the words 'kanko' and 'machizukuri' have existed independently for some time, they have only recently been fused, forming an entirely new concept of tourism and civic development.

There are various debates surrounding the definition of the term *kanko*. In this paper, the generally accepted definition i.e. 'travel for pleasure' is used. *Machizukuri* also holds multiple meanings and does not easily translate into English (Sorensen and Funck, 2007). The literal translation is a synthesis of 'town or city (*machi*)' and 'building (*zukuri*)', which means constructing the physical space in which people live. However, actual movement and actions of *machizukuri* contain the process creating network of mutual aid within community and increasing sense of community, and therefore the definition varies accordingly.

Kanko and *machizukuri* differ fundamentally in their objectives and actions: generally *machizukuri* is carried out by local residents to improve their own living environment, while *kanko* is promoted by tourism industry whose primary focus is on the visitors, not the residents. Nishimura (2009) points out that such fundamental difference leads to occasional friction between the two concepts,

defining *kanko* as 'the promotional activities for the region's economy based on the utilisation of the local environment as a resource', and *machizukuri* as 'the preservation and improvement of the region's environment based on its society'.

That these two terms, which often have completely opposite meanings, were combined to create the new term *kanko machizukuri* is a reflection of the changes in host-guest relations in Japan. The relationship between the host and guest is an actively debated topic in the field of tourism anthropology (Smith, 1977; MacCannell, 1999), particularly in terms of the interrelationship between tourists from advanced countries and developing host countries. This relationship can be beneficial, but cultural and economic discrepancies can occasionally lead to great friction or tension. These host-guest relationships develop not only between two countries but also between regions within a country; even when the cultural or economic difference is small, there still is a potential for some degree of stress or conflict to arise in the host-guest relationship. It is generally accepted that tourism, at some level, is a causal factor for this antagonism; however, such issues do not occur solely as a result of tourism (Urry, 1995). Changes in host-guest relationships seen in *kanko machizukuri* thus reflect contextual changes in Japan's socio-economics.

Furthermore, *kanko machizukuri* is a reminder for promoting tourism in order to revive local

economy. According to Law (1992), older industrial cities which were affected by post-industrialisation and consequently suffered a progressive deterioration of the inner city began to take an interest in tourism as a gateway to economic and civic revitalisation. Loftman and Nevin (1996), for example, describe the beneficial influence of the prestige projects on the regional economies of three cities in England: Birmingham, Sheffield and Manchester. The major developed countries, it seems, are one step ahead of Japan in using tourism as a means for boosting struggling economic areas. Similar to the prestige projects, *kanko machizukuri* is also a means of promoting economic well-being; there is, however, even more to this phenomenon. *Kanko machizukuri* does not simply represent the convergence of the two original terms and their meanings; it also carries a new social connotation embodying a distinctly Japanese characteristic that differs from the regional /local economic promotion measures seen overseas.

In order to understand the new Japanese phenomenon of *kanko machizukuri*, this paper examines *kanko* and *machizukuri* in Japan and the individual development of these concepts. In addition, it traces the socio-economic background that gave rise to the fusion of these two terms and discusses their development as a unified concept. Finally, it establishes the significance of the connection between *kanko* and *machizukuri*.

2. Changes in Tourism Conditions

This section begins with an overview of tourism in Japan and its changes, particularly focussing on domestic tourism. After the World War II, Japan experienced continued economic growth, and as a result, tourism became widely popular. During the 1960s, development in transportation systems, such as the introduction of jet plane services and the construction of highways and the Tokaido Shinkansen (bullet train) line, occurred at roughly the same time as the building of accommodation and other such facilities. From a demand perspective, incomes had increased and leisure time expanded and became more accessible, enabling people to travel for enjoyment and recreation. Mega-events such as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the 1970 World Exposition in Osaka roused the demand for tourism among the

populace. With improved infrastructure and high demand for tourism, the travel industry developed, allowing people to engage in tourism readily and easily.

In those days, tourism mainly comprised group tour because of the thriving popularity of company employee's trip, the lack of means to plan individual holidays adequately, and the economical cost of group travel (Hirooka, 2003). In Japan, the first package tours, planned and sold by travel companies, entered the market as overseas travel products. Similar domestic products became available in the 1970s, further popularising the effortless and low-cost holiday.

For those who profited from tourism, the group tour was a means of attracting hordes of customers, while for the tourists, the group tours were cost-effective and convenient means of travel. Package tour visits to multiple tourist spots within a short period of time became a standard tourism service. Popular tourist spots were included in the package tour and teemed with large numbers of tourist groups. With increase of demand for group tours, many large-scale hotels and ryokan (Japanese inns) were built, particularly in onsen (hot springs) locations, in addition to other facilities, to attract customers and cater to an even larger number of tourists.

Individual tourism preferences however changed greatly. Tourists not only were attracted to the standard planned group tours of popular tourist locations, but also were beginning to seek a variety in their tourism consumption. In other words, tourist destinations (locations) diversified as to accommodate individual interest and needs.

These changes in tourist demand resulted in a considerable decline in conventional tourist destinations and styles of tourism management. The end of economic growth saw the bankruptcy and withdrawal of large-scale hotels, ryokan and visitor facilities, thereby greatly damaging tourism-dependent regional/local economies. The current challenge to be addressed is finding a solution in which conventional tourist destinations, tailored to conventional demands, can cater to the demands of contemporary tourists. This is not only true of specific locations but also of the travel industry as a whole.

Different factors underlie the current changes in the state of the tourism: an increase in leisure time

accompanied by a decrease in working hours, higher incomes, lower commuting costs due to the improvement of transport networks and socio-economic developments through the advancements in information technology (IT). The increase in production capacity that accompanies the development of a capitalist society is not only responsible for diversifying individual consumer lifestyles; it has also greatly changed the state of tourism. In spite of the convoluted process, both available leisure time and economic margins have increased, and as society has become more affluent, tourism has transformed from the stereotypical mass tourism to a more diverse pattern known as 'alternative tourism'. From this perspective, tourism is no longer a special activity separate from daily life but rather an extension of it, contributing to consumption, the quest for happiness and the joys of social interaction.

Another factor to consider is the emphasis on global sustainable development in resolving the widening economic disparity caused by globalization and the severity of the global environmental issues. The term 'sustainable development' applies not only to environmental concerns but also to the society and development for pursuit of a region's social, economic and cultural sustainability. The key concepts related to tackling environmental problems, as outlined in the Brundtland Report, were combined and developed alongside city/regional policies at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Although many countries have integrated these policies into their own systems, they mainly focused on the developed nations of Europe. In 1987, Japan enacted the Law for Development of Comprehensive Resort Areas (Resort Law), which encouraged large-scale developments, including ski resorts, golf courses and other recreational facilities, thus furthering the destruction of Japan's natural environment. During the subsequent economic collapse, maintaining those facilities placed pressure on local government budgets, causing a reassessment of land development policies and a search for sustainability that was taken into account in the tourism industry; this is reflected in 'sustainable' tourism schemes.

3. Changes surrounding *Machizukuri*

Just as there have been changes surrounding tourism and the meaning of the term *kanko*, there have also been widespread changes in the concept of *machizukuri*. This section reviews the definition of *machizukuri*, outlining the changes in the understanding of this concept.

Machizukuri is an ambiguous term that is often used obscurely. However, many share the common understanding that it relates to a group of residents within a region/local area who, with the support and cooperation of the government and other organisations, undertake activities to improve the living environment of the region/local, or additionally, to the overall process of regional/local development through citizen initiative (Watanabe, 1997; Sato, 1999). In fact, it was only in the 1970s that this term became widely used. Within the fast growing economy, the development of factories and road construction progressed at a national scale. Most of the development was conducted as public projects, undertaken as an economic priority of government policy and dictated by the central government and the business world. These public projects were predominantly decided upon and executed with very little consideration given to the local residents' lifestyles or opinions. Even non-governmental development had to follow the urban planning system. This development spurred Japanese economic growth and abundance, but it led to rapid urbanisation that caused negative outcomes such as environmental pollution, the deterioration of residential environments and the destruction of historical structures and the natural environment. In response to the destruction of the lifestyles and environments of the local residents, the local community began to take a stand and voice their concerns, giving rise to anti-pollution and anti-development movements. At first, the focus was to protect each region from external developmental pressures driven by the spirit of 'opposition', 'resistance' and 'protection'. Over time, however, the energy channelled into these community movements gradually began to focus on the residents instead, resulting in independent and active self-improvement of local communities. This movement was eventually referred to as *machizukuri*.

This was only the beginning of *machizukuri*.

During the 1980s, the idea of *machizukuri* faced major hurdles. Deregulation and market-oriented policies which characterised Reaganomics in the United States and Thatcherisms in the United Kingdom also swept over Japan under the Nakasone Administration. Under Nakasone's Urban Renaissance Initiative, large-scale redevelopments began in the cities, resulting in problems such as sudden rises in land prices that impeded the *machizukuri* efforts of community groups. With respect to the tourism, many developments based on the Resort Law were undertaken during this period. Furthermore, the continual population outflow from regional towns and rural villages caused under-population issues and a decline in key industries, including many primary industries. It was under these adverse conditions that the *machizukuri* movements took a new turn.

First, an attempt was made to create rules protecting the unique local environment with the assistance of local government bodies. These trends led to improvements in the supporting legislative system. Urban planning in Japan relied upon a nationwide uniform system, which was difficult to carry out in accordance with the specific characteristics of each individual region/local area. However, the anti-development and pro-*machizukuri* efforts led to the introduction of a 'District Plan' system, in which individual districts could create their own rules within the overall city planning scheme. It means that ordinal people can get an opportunity to get involved in creating and maintaining their own living environment positively. There was also advancement in the establishment of prefectural/municipal ordinance for *machizukuri* by local government bodies.

Second, for commercial and regional/local economic revitalisation, local government bodies and local business organized events aimed at attracting people to the region/local area, selling local products widely, and sharing information of the region. These activities became part of the *machizukuri* methodology. Efforts were made toward industrial and local economic development and regional revitalisation, while reassessing the region's /local resources. Through these changes, *machizukuri* that had previously centred on 'opposition,' 'resistance' and 'protection' now transitioned to a *machizukuri*, in which local

residents cooperated to independently consider and tackle the region's/local problems. In this way, the aims, subject matter and methods of *machizukuri* have diversified since the end of the 1980s. At the beginning of the 1990s, both the concept of *machizukuri* and the socioeconomic backgrounds of its participants became wider and more heterogeneous.

During the 1990s, however, Japan experienced a decline in national and regional finance after the economic bubble burst. In the course of 10 years from the Hashimoto to the Koizumi Administration, the role of the national and regional governments was suddenly reduced, conforming to the neo-liberal policies of deregulation and the limited government. Similar government trends were seen in the United States and the United Kingdom just 10 years earlier. National- and regional-level financial difficulties and reductions in government spending and public works created a large number of problems, including reduced public services and loss of employment opportunities. Yet, on the other hand, these difficulties also brought about an increased participation and awareness of *machizukuri* among the people. In addition, the Great Hanshin earthquake disaster of 1995 greatly changed people's awareness and attitudes towards volunteer activities and grassroots civic activity groups, greatly influencing the way in which residents and citizens became involved in *machizukuri*. After the 1998 enactment of the Act on Promotion of Specified Nonprofit Activities, civic activity groups began to form one after the other in various locations, and the people were given more opportunities to independently participate at the regional/local society through organized civic activities. Thanks to the growing interest in citizen participation, the essential concepts of *machizukuri* have multiplied. *Machizukuri* now embraces the recovery of regional/ local communities and human relations, which were weakened and repressed under economic growth, and even helps in the education and learning of individual citizens wishing to get involved.

As *machizukuri* became a widespread movement for the improvement of living environments in urbanised areas, local residents began to seek out ways of direct participation in this process. The meaning of *machizukuri* gradually transitioned

from its original meaning of 'resistance', 'opposition' and 'protection' movements to signify the independent initiatives of residents who were more concerned with 'participation', 'creation' and 'cultivation'. This also reflects in how people's perception of governance of the shared space known as a *machi* (community) has slowly shifted from the administration to the citizens.

Today, the term *machizukuri* is also used when planning public projects, such as city planning, or in administrative documents, such as comprehensive plan. The usage of this term was initially criticised as being a rhetorical attempt by the administration to emphasise resident participation. In recent years, however, such criticisms have been brushed aside as the crucial relationship between successful *machizukuri* and partnerships among residents, the administration and regional groups has become more widely accepted. The challenges and goals of *machizukuri* have expanded alongside the diversification of regional problems, moving beyond the improvement of living environments to include welfare services, environments, parenting, regional security, stimulation of regional economies and townscaping.

It is important to understand that as *machizukuri* develops, so do opportunities for local residents to directly shape and influence the place where they live. These opportunities strengthen relationships among residents and heighten a sense of sentimental attachment to the place, while further deepening the role of local residents in *machizukuri*.

4. The Relationship between *Kanko* and *Machizukuri*

As previously stated, the expansion of the concept *machizukuri* after the 1990s coincided with the era in which the very survival of regional society became endangered. In many towns and rural areas, there has been an obvious decline in primary and secondary industries, and with issues such as population decline and ageing, *machizukuri* must face the problem of restoring regional socioeconomic structures. For example, in rural areas, *genkai shuraku* or 'limited communities' is a serious issue.¹⁾ These are communities which are experiencing considerable population outflow and ageing, rendering the functional maintenance of

the community extremely difficult. According to a national survey, approximately 1,400 of these communities exist in the country.²⁾ Rural areas are experiencing a decline in primary industries because of the importation of agricultural produce and timber. These effects are not limited to the suspension of community functions; the importation also causes damage to the natural landscape as unmanaged mountains, forests and fields are abandoned.

In smaller regional cities, in addition to the continual suburban development and sprawl, the deregulation policies of the 1990s led to the placement of large-scale industrial facilities in suburban locations; this caused a severe decline of city centres and related social problems. Although the scale varies, city centres of regional cities have the highest volume of pedestrian traffic; are lined with train stations, department stores, shops and offices and are the spaces that create the image of their communities. However, since the 2000s, many stores have closed, offices have relocated and city centres have suddenly emptied, while large-scale shopping malls have sprung up throughout the region. According to amendments in City Planning Act, it is within the framework of the legislative system for the local government to establish fixed control over the location of large-scale commercial facilities. A large number of local governments, however, have not actively sought to take this control.³⁾ As a result, the economic vitality of the entire region has been impaired, negatively influencing perceptions of the region and the daily lives of the residents.

Problems concerning *genkai shuraku* and the issues of restoring city centres have become a primary challenge of *machizukuri* in both towns and regions all over Japan. Therefore, tourism as well as the ensuing interaction and attraction of customers were presented as a means of reviving these communities, and as a consequence, alleviating their social problems. Regarding tourism, mass tourism, as mentioned earlier, had already reached its peak; therefore, it became essential for tourism suppliers to create new and attractive tourist targets that could satisfy diverse tourist needs. These new tourist targets could not simply be conventional tourist spots; they had to have more varied features and be located in a regional/local space that was capable of maintaining

and managing those features. In this way, tourism naturally began to strengthen their ties with *machizukuri*, precipitating greater optimism regarding the effects of *machizukuri* on tourism. This gave rise to a mutual dependency between *machizukuri* and tourism, further prompting a search for initiatives that addressed both. Such efforts were actually realised in some locations, and the term *kanko machizukuri* was born in order to describe the movement towards integration of *machizukuri* and tourism.

The link between tourism and regional revitalisation can also be seen in other developed countries. As mentioned at the start of this paper, in England during the 1980s, city centre renewal was encouraged in order to revive cities like Bradford and Birmingham, which had undergone an inevitable decline during the post-industrial era. These renewal efforts aimed to utilise heritage, commercial and cultural facilities in order to make the cities more appealing to tourists. Furthermore, the preservation of rural landscapes was seen as a type of rural tourism and developed into a stable, economic policy for agricultural industries.

England, however, differs from Japan in that the social awareness of a shared space formed at a much earlier stage, and once it matured to a certain degree, tourism was linked to regional revitalisation.

Since the implementation of a 'garden city'⁽⁴⁾ at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, there has been a long list of achievements on the improvement of living environments in England, from the inner urban to the outer suburban areas. These extensive achievements have bolstered citizen involvement in the governance of the shared space, i.e. their region/local area. In other words, the contribution of citizens to the formation and management of their shared space is firmly established as social consciousness. This contribution is also evident in the long history and accumulation of improvements in living environments and the maintenance of rural landscapes that are objects of the local community's adoration. This social control of shared and private space is more ingrained in England than in Japan. Hence, efforts towards regional revival and tourism in England do not have the same element of interpersonal exchange and the participation or cooperation of the community quite as distinctly as they do in Japan;

rather, they focus more on the transition to sustainable city structures or the creation of town images.

From this perspective, the concept of *kanko machizukuri* in Japan allowed for the simultaneous development of both tourism and civilian management of the shared space known as *machizukuri*, within the historical context specific to Japan that developed later and more rapidly than other advanced countries (Yamada, 2011). Due to the high level of economic development after World War II, Japan enjoyed an abundance of material wealth, which it celebrated through mass production and consumption. The burst of the economic bubble at the beginning of 1990s and the subsequent long and continuous recession, however, caused a rapid turn towards tourism as a source of economic stimulation. The socioeconomic need for both tourism and *machizukuri* (resident contribution to the creation and management of space) created a mutual dependency between the two, giving rise to the concept of *kanko machizukuri*.

There were, of course, some regions/local areas that had already been conscious of the relationship between *kanko* and *machizukuri* and had engaged in related efforts even before *kanko machizukuri* became the focus of much attention. Such efforts, however, were few and limited to either areas with unique regional resources, such as historical buildings, or areas that benefited by being excluded from the wave of development during the period of high economic growth and the bubble economy. Now, such regions are drawing great attention as *kanko machizukuri* models. Among the common features shared by *kanko machizukuri* models, the most significant is the pivotal role that local residents play in controlling the process and guiding both visitors and funds to the region. By meeting and merging regional resources across unique environments and culture, local residents attempt to increase the value of their resources. Most importantly, local residents enjoy participating in these efforts and the resulting interactions. Often *kanko machizukuri* fosters new relationships between visitors and local residents that go beyond the conventional guest–host relationship. Therefore, the new and unique significance of *kanko machizukuri* transcends the former separation of *kanko* and *machizukuri*.

5. Future Prospects and Challenges of *Kanko Machizukuri*

Most conventional research on the *kanko machizukuri* phenomenon in Japan has analysed the methods of stimulating tourism in terms of regional/local resources and the roles and management of key individuals or organizations involved in *kanko machizukuri* efforts, focusing on the pioneering efforts of certain regions. In these case study analyses, this research attempts to determine the future prospects and trends in the developing nature of *kanko machizukuri* as well as the methods of overcoming the challenges presented by these developments. Simply studying practical methods using case studies, however, may not be enough; the clarification of the historical meanings of *kanko machizukuri* as well as the challenges and perspectives based on the awareness of these meanings is necessary to bring depth to the research on the subject.

As previously mentioned, research has conventionally focused on either *kanko* or *machizukuri* as individual research topics. To elaborate, research centred on tourism research, the social meaning underlying changes in people's leisure time and lifestyles, and the accompanying changes in the goals, targets and means of tourism. Or it centred on *machizukuri*, the analysis of regional/local problems, and the primary relationships involved in them. Today, however, current developments in tourism in Japan necessitate more research into the new field of *kanko machizukuri*. The following section discusses two points that have recently been identified.

First, when looking back over the history of tourism, there has been a transition from a passive and uniform tourism based on the idea of stress relief from work to an active tourism that also focuses on the need for self-fulfilment or other forms of satisfaction. In *machizukuri*, there has also been a rather large shift from a passive attitude towards regional/local problems, including those connected to the destruction of living environments, to an independent and active *machizukuri* based on 'participation' and 'partnership'. *Kanko machizukuri* has emerged from these transitions, with *kanko* and *machizukuri* merging as a result of the increasing participant activity.

Second, from the resident's perspective, both

kanko and *machizukuri* are based on the use of leisure time; however, the two activities are separated into different areas: while *kanko* is an exception to day-to-day life, *machizukuri* is more quotidian. Nowadays, however, this separation has become relative: *kanko machizukuri* has unified them, thus becoming a single space with attributes of both.

As tourism is an action that follows transferal to a greater or lesser extent, people are able to become involved in an area outside of their daily lives. Therefore, *kanko machizukuri* provides the opportunity for both local residents and visitors to contribute to the region independently. This opportunity nurtures the reciprocal exchange between visitors and the local community, leading to the possible deepening of mutual understanding of lifestyles, culture and values. *Kanko machizukuri* uses this process to heighten both the local resident and the visitor's sentimental attachment to the region, which could potentially lead to an active contribution for the region. Therefore, in practicing *kanko machizukuri*, the role of self-fulfilment -both expected and unexpected- becomes essential. The way in which this point is perceived is an important issue in the concept of *kanko machizukuri*.

There are great expectations for *kanko machizukuri* as a means of revitalising regions and for *machizukuri* as a tool for attracting tourism. The national and regional government bodies have not hesitated to jump on this bandwagon. However, if this process is seen simply as a promotion of tourism or a mechanical merger with conventional *machizukuri*, then *kanko machizukuri* initiatives will lack sustainability. For *kanko machizukuri*'s long-term survival, it must be based on new opportunities in people's daily lives and lifestyle changes. This requires a vision and process design that considers the potential inherent in *kanko machizukuri*. The critical moment in the practice of *kanko machizukuri* in Japan begins now.

Notes

- 1) *Genkai shuraku* refers to regions where the percentage of elderly people over the age of 65 is above 50% of the overall population.
- 2) 'Survey of actual conditions and other related factors of community functions according to *genkai shuraku*' is a survey commissioned to the Rural Development Planning Commission by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and

Fisheries (2006).

3) Control of land use in Japan is extremely lax according to the Urban Planning Act. Furthermore, as proprietor/landowner rights are very strong, there is much opposition to any strengthening of land use regulations by the regional governments. After the amendment to the Urban Planning Act in 1999, large-scale stores began to open successively. As urban centres declined drastically, the Urban Planning Act was once again revised in 2003, fixing the building regulations for large-scale commercial facilities in suburban areas.

4) 'Garden city' is a concept of urban planning developed by Sir Ebenezer Howard. The first garden city was created in Letchworth by Howard, Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker in 1899, and the movement is now widespread in England and all over the world. Garden city aims to build self-contained community including residences, industry and agriculture surrounded by green areas accommodating a population of around 30,000.

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